

DISMANTLING CONFUSION'S MASTERPIECE

by Dr. John A. Howard

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In the second act of *Macbeth*, the protagonist, thinking to ease his troubled mind by praying in the chapel, utters this tortured comment:

Confusion now hath made his masterpiece
Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope
The Lord's anointed temple and stole
There the life o' the building.

In contemplating the situation in higher education today, one is hard put to find a phraseology of sufficient force to reflect the vast disarray that has come about. Perhaps a paraphrase of Macbeth's cry of anguish will state the case better than anything else can.

Confusion now hath made his masterpiece
Most outrageous Nonsense hath broke ope
The honored House of Intellect and stole
There the life o' the building.

In my presentation today, I shall try to suggest the degree to which sense has given way to nonsense, often impassioned nonsense, and suggest some actions I believe will help restore sanity and integrity to wayward academia.

Let us begin with the phrase which occurs in the theme of this conference as an illustration of how non-thought has come to prevail in educational deliberations and actions. "In loco parentis" means, of course, "in place of parents." Many institutions of higher learning, both public and private, have declared that their responsibilities are primarily with the mind of the student and it is not their proper role to concern themselves with the attitudes, the conduct and/or the ideals of the student. Indeed, a number of spokesmen have gone on to assert that

it is, or would be, an improper invasion of individual rights for a college to concern itself with the mode of living of the students. Since the enrollees are old enough to have babies, to vote and be drafted into military service, it would be unjustifiable arrogance, so the theory goes, to intervene in their private lives.

That point of view has, to a great extent, become the proclaimed operating orthodoxy of higher education. The facts, however, give us a rather different story. Actually, I doubt if there is even one student in the country who really wants the colleges to stop acting as parents in a number of ways. The parent takes care of the child financially until the child is capable of caring for himself. Every college program of financial aid is conducted in loco parentis. The college has risen to help because the young person can't handle the situation by himself. One doesn't hear any objections on principle or on any other grounds to the provision of such funds for the students, except the periodic cry that the financial aid is insufficient. Similarly, the parent provides help for the child when he is sick or when he gets into trouble. Most colleges on their own initiative try to help the student when he gets into trouble with the law or when he has a serious medical problem, and again the objections to such quasi-parental activity are practically non-existent. The rejection of the parental role which sounds so modern and magnanimous in the academic rhetoric simply does not match the actuality. The question, then, is not whether the proper functions of a college should or should not overlap the functions of a parent, but instead, in what ways and for what reasons they may do so.

Government Control Increases

Turning to the other part of the option posed in the conference theme—the determination of college purpose and policy by the central government—we also find more phrasing and posturing than good sense. Most people don't know or have forgotten that until twenty-five years ago, there was an almost unanimous opinion among educators that the federal government should not provide funds for education, lest the government should through its funding control the educational process. As legislation to provide federal funding came into being, the long-standing fear of federal domination was in part allayed by phrases written into the successive bills prohibiting governmental meddling in campus decisions. Section 102 of the National Defense Education Act asserts, for instance, "Nothing contained in this Act shall be construed to authorize any department, agency, officer, or employee of the United States to exercise any direction, supervision or control over the curriculum, program of instruction, administration, or personnel of any educational institution or school system." It is interesting to compare that noble-sounding and comprehensive disavowal of federal control, uttered perhaps in all earnestness sixteen years ago, with the activities of the federal compliance officers who today enforce the federal regulations pertaining to occupational safety and health, equal employment opportunities, equal regulations for students of both sexes, etc. The government does control, intentionally, and often aggressively, an increasing range of educational decisions.

The foolishness of this circumstance becomes apparent when we stop to realize that the government's compliance officers have a one-dimensional responsibility. For example, one group of them is composed of specialists in determining whether a college has or has not met the letter and the spirit of the law governing equal employment opportunities. These officials are obliged to see that each institution operates in accord with that law, no matter what else is distorted or compromised. They can hardly be expected to understand and take into account such matters as tenure, faculty morale, seniority, availability of truly qualified candidates and all the other variables that operate in the selection and retention of a competent smoothly functioning faculty. They look at the college's employment situation through their own narrow lens and everything else must give way. This growing army of government policemen, while simply doing the job for which they are hired, is contributing very generously to the confusion which is now triumphant on the nation's campuses. It is not the fault of these people, but the fault of their employer. The government, I believe, has wrongly usurped authority which properly belongs to educational personnel.

Re-examining Education's Purposes

Well, how do we go about dismantling the confusion and reordering the academic community so that it can effectively carry out its proper functions? First, and above all, I think we must re-examine the basic purposes of education. Once the purposes are clearly determined, all other questions fall into subordinate categories and may be resolved accord-

ing to which competing answers will contribute to the institutional objectives and which answers will thwart or undermine them.

To be sure, in a pluralistic society it is appropriate, perhaps even necessary, for each educational institution to determine its own spectrum of purpose and to judge how those purposes can best be fulfilled. Even so, there are certain obligations inherent in the educational process which fall upon all colleges.

Education, by definition, is presumed to be a service by means of which the student attains certain knowledge or skills or understanding that is useful



to him. It may involve only the acquisition of a certain proficiency, as in learning to play the trumpet or learning to run a sewing machine. It may be confined to a concentrated body of knowledge which will prepare the person to be an accountant, a surveyor or a machinist. In such instances, the quality of educational service may be rightly judged according to the progress made by the students enrolled in the narrowly focused objective of each program.

In sharp contrast, the education provided by an American college or university where the typical student is expected to attend through four years cannot properly be evaluated merely in terms of the progress the student has made in developing the skills and/or acquiring the knowledge presented in the course work in which he has enrolled. The college is not merely an aggregate of courses. It is a living community which shapes and molds the attitudes and the ideals and the priorities and the character of its students just as powerfully as does the inner city neighborhood, or the country club environment, or the farm from which the student came. Indeed, the influence of the college experience upon many students seems to be far greater and far more permanent than all the influences of the preceding

seventeen or eighteen years. Whether the college intends it or not, the student is powerfully affected by a myriad of circumstances within the institution, of which the formal curriculum is only a part, and which in toto comprise the educating experience of that institution.

Fundamental Changes During College

This comprehensive educating experience has at least three fundamental and unavoidable dimensions: the personal, the social and the spiritual. Each student, as a result of attending a specific college, will be changed in ways which affect him as an individual with regard to such aspects as his physical health, his emotional stability, his interests and hobbies, his reading habits, his aspirations, his values and the manner in which he leads his life. He will also, because of the college experience, be changed in his relationships to other people and groups of people, to his government and other institutions of society. His college years will in part determine his participation in various social groups or his opposition to them. Furthermore, his relationship to his religion will have changed significantly as a result of his years in college. The changes may be perceived by him or by others as changes for the better or for the worse, but changes there will be.

If a serious effort were ever made to evaluate fully the relative merits of various institutions of higher learning, it would, I believe, require the assembling of statistical information about the alumni of each institution with respect to the rates of divorce, nervous breakdown, suicide, alcoholism and other drug addictions, as well as data about job performance, citizenship activities, family stability and involvement in humanitarian endeavors and church work, for to a greater or lesser extent, the college willy-nilly will have had some part in these later aspects of the life of its graduates.

To return then to the statement of purposes of the individual college, it is an exercise in self-delusion to restrict the stated objectives to intellectual, aesthetic and academic matters. If the trustees and officers of an American college actually believe the education which is taking place on their campuses is limited to these matters, then it seems to me they are not only naive about their very great responsibilities, but perhaps dangerous, considering the influence which their judgments exert over many lives.

Education throughout the world, until quite recently, has been perceived to have the obligation to transmit knowledge and skills to the young and also, of at least equal importance, to train the young how to live affirmatively and effectively in the society which provides the education. The latter part of that formula, the acculturation of the student, has been rejected in our era by much of higher education, supposedly because of the avoidance of the *in loco parentis* role and/or because in this era of "the new morality," one isn't supposed to judge matters of right and wrong in human conduct.

In this respect, nonsense has taken wing and soared to magnificent heights. What such an attitude implies is that in matters attended to by course work, the student, however old he may be, is regarded as an

apprentice, properly come to learn from a professor who has made it his business to know more than most people about that particular subject. It is a master-apprentice relationship. However, as soon as everyone goes out the classroom door, all opinions, however uninformed or misinformed, are suddenly equally valid. Inside the classroom, knowledge is expected to prevail over ignorance, experience over inexperience, informed judgment over raw judgment. Outside the classroom, inexplicably, that hierarchy is abandoned. It is thought students should have the prerogative (or at the very least have an equal vote in the body which has the prerogative) to make rules for the dormitory, determine who shall speak on the campus platforms, make policies governing the student newspaper and make whatever other judgments determine the out-of-class aspects of the campus community. That students need to be involved in judgment making is without question a necessary part of the educational experience, but to give them responsibility for judgments far beyond the range of their knowledge, training, and experience is to invite catastrophe. And if one really looks at what has happened on such campuses, it appears that catastrophe has accepted the invitation.

It seems to me that any statement of purpose for an educational institution is incomplete that does not encompass in addition to the academic objectives, the institution's intent with regard to the qualities it hopes its graduates will reflect as individual human beings, and as members of society, and to the extent that the nature of the institution permits, its aspirations for the student's spiritual life. This seems to me an irreducible minimum both because of the role which formal education needs to play in any viable society, and also because whether the institution desires to do so or does not, it will nonetheless have a very powerful impact upon its students in all these dimensions, given the nature of the American college and university.

Education has its own proper function to perform which may naturally, and altogether properly, coincide with some parental functions or with some governmental functions, but any overlapping is incidental and no cause for alarm.

Trustees Wield Ultimate Authority

Let us turn now to the various categories of college personnel and offer a few illustrations of the nonsense that has become commonplace on campuses. Let's start with the trustees. They, by the terms of the college charter, bear the complete responsibility—that includes the legal, moral, financial and educational responsibility—for everything that transpires on the campus. The trustees are the ones who must choose the president of the institution, who determine its policies, who delegate authority to the president, and through the president, to other officers and groups of the campus.

The concept of a board of trustees as the ultimate authority is a very sound one for many reasons. In the first place, the trustees are presumably people who are chosen for their broad experience, their integrity, good judgment, public service and direct interest in the college. That they are chosen predominantly from the general citizenry, rather than

from the academic community is a reflection of the obligation which an educational institution has to serve the general society, as well as a reflection of the dependence of the college upon the larger society. On those occasions when campus personnel are seriously divided into hostile camps on some issue, as happens in the best of colleges, the outcome is likely to be sounder for the long-range interests of the college because the trustees are the final arbiters. Their judgment is likely to be more objective because they are not daily involved in the partisanship which has arisen. For this reason, too, they form a very useful and effective safeguard for any president who has the wisdom to seek their advice on major decisions wherein the president may be so heavily and directly involved that his perspective is temporarily skewed.



Unfortunately, many boards of trustees have chosen, or have been persuaded, to delegate the most important part of their basic responsibility to campus personnel, concentrating their attention on fund-raising, the operating budget and sometimes also on campus construction and the maintenance of the plant. It seems a reasonable assumption that if the trustees had actually understood their responsibilities, the lawlessness, arson, vandalism, terrorism, and illegal drug use that took place on many campuses in the crazy sixties would have been nipped in the bud, or perhaps might have been prevented altogether. Having delegated full responsibility for the students and faculty to the president and his associates, many boards of trustees seem to have been unwilling or incapable of taking whatever action may have been necessary to terminate conduct of a kind which would never have been tolerated in their businesses, their homes, or any other part of society. To go a step further, it seems likely that if trustees truly understood the long-range consequences for the

students of coeducational dormitories, continued tolerance of illegal drugs on campus, pervasive faculty hostility to the private enterprise system, and some of the other circumstances that exist on various campuses, many trustees would either reassert their authority as policy-makers, or else resign.

College Trustee Hierarchies

Let me note one other illustration of the lapse of good sense in this era of trusteeship. Many colleges have chosen to name as trustees one or more currently enrolled students and/or currently employed members of their own faculty. Indeed, it is my understanding that a law has been passed in Illinois obliging each public institution of higher learning to have one of its own students as a board member. If you consider the structure of the college, this makes no sense at all. As previously noted, the trustees are vested with full authority over the operation of the college. Some part, usually a very large part, of their responsibility is delegated to the president or through the president, to other campus personnel. The president is responsible to the board for the performance of all campus personnel. The only exception to this role that I know of is that a few boards appoint a financial auditor who reports directly to the trustees.

It is unfashionable to speak of hierarchies nowadays, but the fact is that the president is subordinate to the trustees and by the nature of his duties, he is responsible for and superior to all other personnel formally associated with the college. It is his job to take whatever action is necessary to see to it that all students, faculty and other employees conform to the policies set by the trustees. It is an anomaly for the president to be superior to and subordinate to the same individual, as he is when one of his students or faculty members also serves as one of his trustees. Depending upon the character of the individuals, such an appointment may work for a while, but the president will find himself in an altogether impossible position if he and the student or faculty trustee fall into disagreement over a major issue.

Please do not misread my position on this matter. I think it critically important for students and faculty members to have direct contact with the trustees and even to make their own presentations to the trustees during board meetings if they wish to do so. Such interaction is a necessary preliminary to wise trustee policy decisions, but that is an altogether different matter from having formal representation on the board.

President As Educational Philosopher

Moving on to the role of the administration, it appears that there is some room here, too, for the reassertion of common sense. Since the president sits at the pinnacle of the operating hierarchy, it is clear that the success of the college in its educational mission will be dependent upon the effectiveness of the president as an educational leader. Whatever other qualifications may be sought in the individual chosen as president, certainly the candidate's performance as an educational philosopher known for his wisdom about the purposes of education and how those purposes can best be fulfilled, should

weigh heavily in the appointment. One has the impression that this has not often been the case in recent years. Talents as professional managers who can keep things running smoothly or talents as fund-raisers and grant-getters seem to have been more highly prized in the selection of a president than professional expertise in the philosophy of education.

In any case, once the president has been named, he has a major obligation, it seems to me, to make himself the foremost scholar of his faculty in the philosophy of education so that he may provide vigorous leadership in stating the purposes of his institution and in planning the programs to implement them. This does not seem to be what happens. In the various professional meetings of college administrators, the agenda seems to be almost exclusively devoted to the mechanics of education: funding, foreign study, faculty unionization, non-discrimination, etc., and almost never concerned with what they hope will be the outcome for the student of his educational experience. By working on the mechanics of education, administrators may improve the efficiency of the educational vehicle, but if nobody has identified the proper destination, then the educational enterprise may be traveling faster sideways or toward disaster rather than toward enlightenment.

Another area where there seems to have been a notable lapse of administrative good sense is in the failure to recognize that the character of campus life does affect very profoundly the later life of the student. The twenty-year-old on the American campus generally does not behave in the way he would if at the same age, he were living in an apartment with a job. On campus he may, if he chooses, get drunk three nights in a row and miss his morning classes. If he has a brain, he can still pass the course. The second morning he doesn't show up for work, there is suddenly no job. In like manner, he may note that the college has authorized a chapter of SDS, the Young Socialists Alliance, or some other revolutionary organization. It has the college's blessing, it would be a new experience and perhaps an exciting one, and the student may say, "Why not?" and give it a try. The same individual out in the real world may say to himself, "I'm not sure my boss would think joining such a group is a red hot idea," and forget the whole thing.

What has occurred is that the colleges which refuse to concern themselves with what happens to the student outside of class, in many instances have created an enclave where the student feels free to experiment with various kinds of destructive or dangerous conduct that seem to be free of any serious consequences. However, in the real world, there are subtle but rather effective restraints that tend to discourage foolish or dangerous experiments. No matter how persuasive the high flown rhetoric may be about not operating in loco parentis, the fact is that failure to consider what happens to the student in his out-of-class experience is a cop-out and one that may have very dire consequences for the students in their later life.

Faulty Thinking Among Faculties, Too

As for the faculty, they too, have many oppor-

tunities to do away with entrenched nonsense. In this case, again time permits only a couple of illustrations of the thoughtless academic practices which have come to prevail in many places. One of the most debilitating curricular changes of recent years has been the general collapse of the belief which once prevailed that there is a body of knowledge which every educated citizen of a free nation ought to possess. This concern was voiced by Allan Bloom in an article in the fall issue of *Daedalus*. He wrote:

The university does not represent a community the bonds of which are constituted by a shared literary heritage, and friendships are not formed by the common study of the important issues. Professors Werner J. Dannhauser and L. Pearce Williams at Cornell University posed this question to that institution's president:

If we prove to you that an Arts and Sciences student can now receive a B.A. degree at Cornell, and thus be presumed to have acquired a liberal education, without having been required to read a line of Plato, the Bible, Shakespeare, Marx or Einstein, would you consider this to be evidence that there is a crisis in education at Cornell?

An answer was never received.

In a recent issue of the *Harvard Magazine*, the Dean of Harvard College echoed the same concern in a lament that a Harvard degree now seemed to reflect little more than a certificate of attendance. If the citizens of the country, particularly those who have had the privilege of full undergraduate program of study, are not familiar with the analyses of mankind and of society that have been set forth by the greatest thinkers and writers of the past, then we should not be surprised to see a continuing increase of unenlightened, irresponsible and self-destructive conduct on the part of individuals and an acceleration of the collapse of a lawful and ordered and economically sound society. The aggregate of what all the professors of a college may choose to teach does not necessarily add up to a worthy educational program. The range of courses which a student may choose to take does not necessarily add up to a worthy educational experience. To suppose otherwise in either case is nonsense. It seems to me that a thoughtful faculty would reassert the importance of requiring all students to encompass certain studies as a minimum graduation requirement. I would strongly recommend Russell Kirk's truly extraordinary new book, *The Roots of American Order*, as a brilliantly apt summary of the basic understanding which every American citizen ought to possess.

The second default of faculty good sense which I would call to your attention is the thrust toward the unionization of professors. In the first place, the term "profession" used to imply a vocation in an area of public service to which the individual was admitted only as the result of rigorous special training, and after it was judged that he was prepared to subordinate his self-interest to the benefit of the clientele he served. By definition unionization precludes, I believe, any such concept of profession.

Furthermore, unionization formalizes an adversary relationship between faculty and administration. In a smoothly working college, the president should be the ultimate champion, not the opponent of his faculty colleagues. To pose such a formidable barricade to that colleague relationship seems to me another widespread lapse in thinking within the academic community.

Students and Nonsense

Turning finally to the students, they are primarily the victims rather than the champions of the latter-day nonsense. I doubt that even the grievous student excesses of the 1960s would have amounted to much had the trustees, faculty and administrators performed thoughtfully and responsibly. Surely the students could have been given some guidance and support in making known their legitimate or presumed grievances through more constructive and effective channels.

There are, however, several points I consider worthy of note. I have the impression that many student governments operate more as pressure groups to bring about change than as effective instruments for governing students. On many campuses, student lobby would be a more accurate designation than student government. In the same category, a number of college newspapers seem to be dominated by an attitude of "What are we going to complain about today?" Too often the student newspaper is, editorially, little more than a gripe sheet.

It should be noted that colleges are not immortal. Indeed, there is an epidemic in process from which the collegiate fatality rate is rather high. It seems to me that here is a vast and virtually untapped opportunity for sensible student leaders to use their brains and their energies to build and strengthen and be the affirmative spokesmen for their colleges, rather than devoting so much of their energies to creating issues and feeding the fires of divisiveness. This is not to suggest that students refrain from supporting constructive changes, but there is a great difference between making proposals out of demonstrated respect and affection for that which they would change, and making militant demands or

puffing up grievances simply to achieve visibility or to take an ego trip.

Let me now try to place these comments in the perspective of the public-private education theme. It seemed to me at first that the problem I have raised was one for all of higher education—both public and private. On further reflection, I do not see that to be the case. As the federal government has multiplied its control over those educational institutions which use federal funds, the distinction between public and private institutions has greatly diminished. Actually it does not seem to make much difference whether the federal funds comprise 3% or 30% of the budget. Thus all colleges and universities which use federal funds, are now to a great extent public. Those few institutions which avoid federal funding, the truly private ones, seem to have been relatively free of the problems I have described. One can only conjecture about the reasons why this is the case. I would suppose one main reason is that such institutions must *earn* their supplementary funds in the form of gifts. Their actual performance is judged by the donors and, therefore, they have tried to *think through* the justification for their policies rather than just following the trends of the times. At all events, the truly private colleges and universities, as a group, do seem to understand the problems phrased in this paper and have tried to deal with those problems intelligently.

In conclusion, I should tell you I am not pessimistic about the future of education. Although I credit myself with a sufficiently active imagination, I cannot conceive of things getting any worse. Confusion's masterpiece is, I think, already complete. On the other side of the ledger, there are voices of good sense speaking out. They are even being given a hearing once in a while in major periodicals and through the broadcast media. As we move into the last quarter of the century, our job is to try to revive the "life o' the building" in the House of Intellect, by insisting that nonsense be identified for what it is and rejected, and that it give way to intelligent implementation of the legitimate and proper purposes of education. I am grateful to Hillsdale College for sponsoring this symposium devoted to that objective.

Hillsdale College is marked by its strong independence and its emphasis on academic excellence. It holds that the traditional values of Western civilization, especially including the free society of responsible individuals, are worthy of defense. In maintaining these values, the college has remained independent throughout its 130 years, neither soliciting nor accepting government funding for its operations.